

VZCZCXR07930
PP RUEHDBU RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHMO #0960/01 0660742

ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 070742Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8029
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLN/AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG PRIORITY 3836
RUEHVK/AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK PRIORITY 1965
RUEHYG/AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG PRIORITY 2264

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000960

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KDEM PGOV PINR SOCI RS
SUBJECT: "VICTORY" FOR "A JUST RUSSIA"

REF: A. 06 MOSCOW 12709

1B. 06 MOSCOW 12717

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Summary

11. (SBU) Five youth groups have announced their intention to establish a coalition called "Victory" which would support the newly framed left of center pro-Kremlin party, "For a Just Russia" (SR). "Victory" is positioning itself as a competitor to the youth wing of United Russia (YR), the dominant pro-Kremlin party. "Victory's" leaders hope to have 50,000 members at the time of the group's founding congress in April. However, another SR-affiliated youth group, "For the Motherland" is challenging "Victory" for influence with SR. End summary.

Victory Formation

12. (U) The leaders of Energy of Life (EL), Young Life (YL), the youth branch of the People's Party (YPP), the youth branch of the Social-Democratic Party of Russia (YSDPR) and the human rights civil society organization "Citizen Society" (CS) on February 21 formed "Victory: All Russia Youth Movement for Freedom and Social Justice" youth coalition and pledged their support to the new Kremlin-sponsored party "For a Just Russia" (SR). A representative from the "Young Motherland" youth group attended the press conference and announced his group's intention to participate in coalition activities.

13. (U) All five groups have strong ties to the parties with which they are affiliated and/or enjoy close ties to other important institutions and individuals. The leader of YPP, Dmitriy Gudkov, is the son of Duma Deputy Gennadiy Gudkov. The leader of CS, Anatoliy Nazarov, is a member of Russia's Youth Community Chamber and a member of the Council of Academics of Moscow State University. The leader of the St. Petersburg-based YL, Olga Litvinyenko, is the daughter of the Rector of St. Petersburg's Mining Institute. Other personalities whose names have been mentioned in tandem with the "Victory" coalition include the Vice President of Russia's Thai Boxing Association Aleksandr Kunshin, four-time Russia's "Strongest Man" Elbrus Nigmatullin and reigning Miss Universe and EL co-chairperson Oksana Fedorova.

14. (SBU) EL Chairman Yuriy Lopusov told us that the "Victory" founding congress would take place in April.

Lopusov expected the coalition would have over fifty thousand members and would be governed by co-chairpersons representing the constituent groups. He said that the large number of members could have allowed "Victory" to register itself as an independent party. However, the leaders of the five groups decided that their goals and objectives, and those of Russia's youth, would be better served by forming an independent coalition that could take concrete action on social issues while supporting SR. In a view echoed by the other leaders, YPP's Gudkov insisted that "Victory" would act independently of SR.

15. (SBU) A major obstacle "Victory" faces is a lack of funds. "Victory" leaders told us they had to personally finance a number of their activities. They also received support from the parties they were affiliated with as well as from other organizations and individuals. They had received no money from the GOR, they said.

United Russia Rivals

16. (SBU) "Victory" seeks to position itself as an alternative to YR's "Young Guards." Gudkov promised that the coalition would fight against the "populism" that YR-linked youth organizations had fostered. YL's Litvinyenko said that one of "Victory's" missions was to teach young people what justice, freedom, and patriotism mean in practice. In a press release, "Victory" described its main goal as involving the maximum number of youth in constructive political activities that address the chief challenges facing Russian society.

For the Motherland's Agenda

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17. (SBU) Representatives of the best-known SR-affiliated youth movement, "For the Motherland (FM)," did not attend the press conference. In a mid-February meeting, FM leader Sergey Shargunov told us he had no desire to merge his organization with the other youth groups supporting SR. Shargunov contemptuously described "Victory's" focus on social-welfare programs as a program to "help invalids." Political movements should focus on action. Social projects alone were not sufficient. Shargunov hoped that "FM" would become the locus for SR's more political youth supporters. Shargunov reported that Mironov supports FM's proposed course of action.

Duma Dreams

18. (SBU) Shargunov and leaders of "Victory" make no secret of their political aspirations. Shargunov was quite critical of developments in Russia since Putin had become President, especially regarding freedom and social justice. When asked if they had political aspirations, the leaders of "Victory, all nodded their heads in the affirmative. Lopusov said that, unlike YR, SR's Duma list would not feature a "youth" quota. However, Mironov had promised to include youth representatives, drawn from all of the participating youth groups, among SR's Duma candidates.

Comment

19. (SBU) Combining five separate movements may create the same complications for "Victory" as those encountered by SR at the time of its announced merger. At present, "Victory" leaders appear to carry little weight within SR. One

inauspicious sign: at the February 26 SR Congress Plenary, "Victory" attendees were little more than cheerleaders to the pronouncements of SR heavyweights like Mironov. In contrast "For the Motherland" (FM) has been more successful in organizing political demonstrations. The stage appears set for a competition between FM and "Victory" for the mantle of lead youth group within SR.

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